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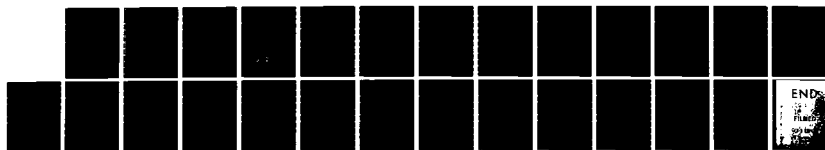
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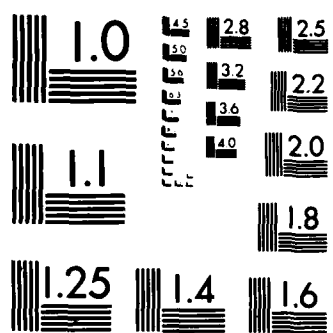
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NRL Memorandum Report 5150

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# On the CO<sub>2</sub> Laser Generated Channel Conductivity and Electron Beam Ionization of Ammonia

A. W. ALI

*Plasma Physics Division*

August 15, 1983

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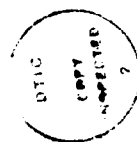
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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)  An equilibrium electron density in ammonia channel generated by CO <sub>2</sub> laser absorption is calculated and the corresponding residual conductivity is given. Electron beam collisional and avalanche ionization parameters in ammonia are presented. Calculations are made for electron beam generated ionization and conductivity in ammonia. These are performed for two experiments. The beam generated conductivity seems to pre- dominate the residual conductivity generated by the laser absorbed channels.		

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# ON THE CO<sub>2</sub> LASER GENERATED CHANNEL CONDUCTIVITY AND ELECTRON BEAM IONIZATION OF AMMONIA

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gaseous channels with appropriate conductivity can facilitate the transport and guidance of charged particle beams and electrical discharges. Such channels can be generated by focusing a beam of high power laser or microwave radiation to breakdown the gas over the desired length. The gas breakdown results in the formation of a plasma and the heating of the gas, thereby generating a conducting channel. Studies<sup>1-3</sup> have often used CO<sub>2</sub> laser to form channels in various gases such as air, N<sub>2</sub>, NH<sub>3</sub> and C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>2</sub>. The characteristics of such channels, i.e., the channel temperature and the channel conductivity must be understood in order to provide the basis for the understanding of charged particle beam transport and guidance in the channel.

In this report we present a preliminary analysis on the characteristics of NH<sub>3</sub> channels formed by using a CO<sub>2</sub> laser where the laser power is below the threshold for breakdown. The report also presents the electron beam ionization (collisional and avalanche) of NH<sub>3</sub> and calculates the conductivity generated by the beam for two typical experiments (NRL and Sandia Experiments). The calculation of the electron beam generated conductivity shows that the beam does its own thing in that the residual channel conductivity plays no role but a neutral density channel left behind by the laser will modify the conductivity generated by the beam. This is because the channel conductivity is either non existent or below the relevant value in these two experiments.

## II. CO<sub>2</sub> LASER ABSORPTION BY NH<sub>3</sub>.

The CO<sub>2</sub> laser is a multi-line laser, and in general it can be tuned to a given frequency. Several of the laser lines are in near resonance with absorption bands in NH<sub>3</sub>. As an example, the  $\nu_2$  mode energy diagram is shown

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in Figure 1 where the  $\text{CO}_2$  laser transitions i.e. R(16) and R(30) are shown to coincide with transitions within the  $\nu_2$  band of  $\text{NH}_3$ . Such pumping in general also leads to lasing<sup>4</sup> within  $\text{NH}_3$  at frequencies smaller compared to the pump frequency. The absorption of the laser quanta by the molecule in the ground state would raise the molecule to  $V=1$  level and several other processes of importance will occur.

1. The vibrational energy is converted to gas kinetic energy through the VT energy exchange.
2. Higher levels can be excited by further absorption of the vibrational quanta, resulting in collisionless dissociation of the molecule.
3. Vibrational-vibrational collisions resulting in the ladder type excitation and dissociation.
4. Stimulated emission.
5. Saturation of absorption.

The first process is very rapid and has a relaxation time<sup>5</sup> of 2.5 nsec/atm. The second process occurs for short pulse lasers ~ in the n sec regime, while the last process occurs for lasers of long duration  $\sim 10$  nsec.

### III. THE NRL EXPERIMENT

The experiment at NRL carried out by the Channel Physics Group in the Plasma Physics Division utilizes a home made multimode  $\text{CO}_2$  laser. This laser has<sup>6</sup> a total power of (50J) and pulse length of 200 nsec. It was used to study channel physics in  $\text{NH}_3$  where a 40 Torr  $\text{NH}_3$  filled the chamber through which the  $\text{CO}_2$  laser was passed in weak focus condition (The focusing was outside the chamber). The energy absorbed by the gas was 25 mJ per  $\text{cm}^3$  resulting<sup>7</sup> in a temperature rise to  $\sim 0.1$  eV.

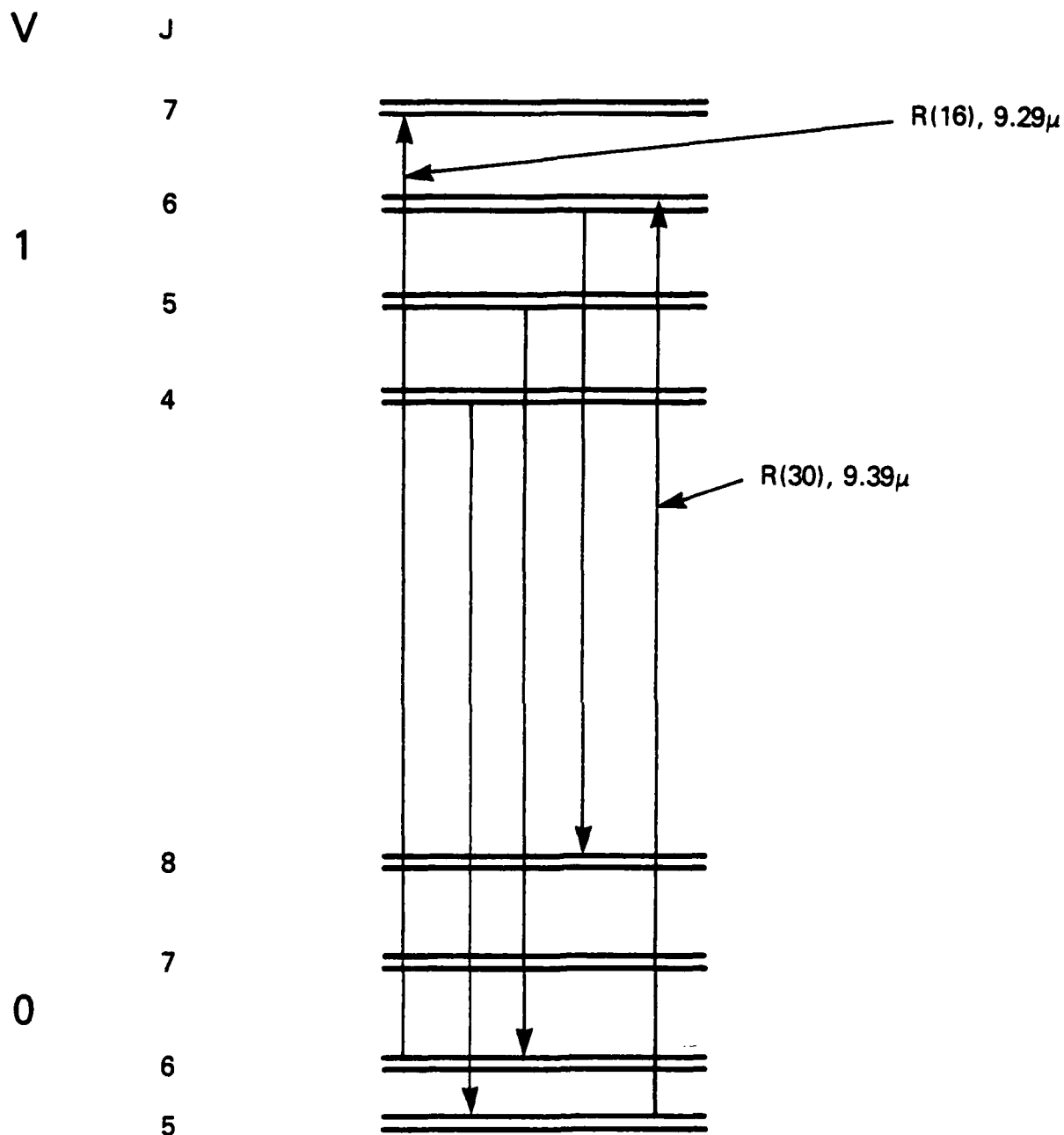


Figure 1 The  $v_2$  mode energy diagram of  $\text{NH}_3$  for the ground state and  $V=1$  level. Two  $\text{CO}_2$  laser bands R(16) and R(30) are shown to indicate the resonance absorption by  $\text{NH}_3$ .

#### IV. THERMAL DISSOCIATION AND IONIZATION OF $\text{NH}_3$

A. In this section we will discuss the dissociation and ionization of  $\text{NH}_3$  based on the equilibrium calculation. The absorption of  $\text{CO}_2$  laser radiation by  $\text{NH}_3$  and the rapid relaxation of the vibrational energy to kinetic energy justifies the equilibrium approach. This relaxation time  $\tau_{VT}$  has been measured<sup>5</sup> in pure  $\text{NH}_3$  and was found to be equal to 2.5 nsec/atm. This time in the case of the NRL experiment is 47.5 nsec which is still much smaller than the pulse width ( $\sim 200$  nsec.).

The mass action law<sup>8</sup> for the dissociation equilibrium is

$$\frac{H \text{ NH}_2}{\text{NH}_3} = K \quad (1)$$

Where  $K$  is the equilibrium constant  $H$ ,  $\text{NH}_2$  and  $\text{NH}_3$  are the densities of the relevant species. The equilibrium constant can be expressed<sup>8</sup> as

$$K = \frac{Q(H) Q(\text{NH}_2)}{Q(\text{NH}_3)} e^{-\Delta E/RT} \quad (2)$$

Where  $Q(S)$  is the total partition functions of species  $S$  and is a function of temperature only. The total partition function in general is a product<sup>8</sup> of translational and internal partition functions of species  $S$  i.e.,  $Q = Q_{tv} Q_{int}$ . Thus

$$K = \left( \frac{2\pi k T M_H}{h^2} \right)^{3/2} \frac{Q_{int}(H) Q_{int}(\text{NH}_2)}{Q_{int}(\text{NH}_3)} \quad (3)$$

We shall assume that the major contribution to the internal partition functions of the molecule is due to the rotational and vibrational excitation

which is always the case for poly-atomic molecules at temperatures below 1eV. The rotational partition function for  $\text{NH}_2$  and  $\text{NH}_3$  are<sup>8</sup>

$$Q_r = 0.00693 \times 10^6 \sqrt{\frac{I_A I_B I_C}{T}} \quad (4)$$

Where  $I_A$ ,  $I_B$  and  $I_C$  are the moments of inertia along the principal axis or planes. On the other hand, the vibrational partition function is<sup>8</sup>

$$Q_v = \prod_i \left[ \frac{1 - e^{-\omega_i hc/kT}}{1 - e^{-\omega_i hc/kT}} \right]^{-1} \quad (5)$$

Where  $\omega_i$  is the frequency of the vibrational excitation and  $d_i$  is the degree of degeneracy. Utilizing these relations into the equilibrium constant one obtains

$$K = (0.31T)^{3/2} \times 10^{21} \frac{\sqrt{\frac{I_A I_B I_C}{T}}_{\text{NH}_2}}{\sqrt{\frac{I_A I_B I_C}{T}}_{\text{NH}_3}} \frac{\prod_i (1 - e^{-\omega_i hc/kT})_{\text{NH}_2}^{d_i}}{\prod_i (1 - e^{-\omega_i hc/kT})_{\text{NH}_3}^{d_i}} \exp\left(-\frac{49880}{kT}\right) \quad (6)$$

The vibrational partition function is calculated for several temperatures and are shown in Table I

TABLE I

$T(^{\circ}\text{K})$	$Q^v(\text{NH}_2)$	$Q^v(\text{NH}_3)$
1000	1.26	2.07
2000	1.92	5.9

The results in Table I are obtained using the following excitation energies<sup>2</sup> 0.4, 0.12, 0.43 and 0.2 for the vibrational levels of  $\text{NH}_2$  and 0.4, 0.19 and

0.4 for  $\text{NH}_2$ . Assuming that the moments of inertia of  $\text{NH}_2$  and  $\text{NH}_3$  are the same, we obtain

$$K = (0.3T)^{3/2} \times 10^{21} R(T) \text{Exp} \left( - \frac{49880}{kT} \right) \quad (7)$$

Where  $R$  is the ratio of the vibrational partition functions of  $\text{NH}_2$  to  $\text{NH}_3$ . If we designate  $\alpha$  as the degree of dissociation i.e.  $\alpha = \frac{H}{\text{NH}_3}$  then the mass action law can be written as

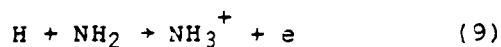
$$\alpha^2 \text{NH}_3 = K = (0.3T)^{3/2} \times 10^{21} R(T) \text{Exp} \left( - \frac{49880}{kT} \right) \quad (8)$$

Values of  $\alpha$  for several temperatures are given in Table II for  $\text{NH}_3 = 1.4 \times 10^{18} \text{ cm}^{-3}$  ( ~ 40 Torr).

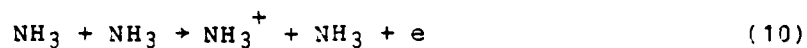
TABLE II

<u>T(°K)</u>	<u><math>\alpha</math></u>
1160	1.2(-6)
2000	2(-2)
2200	1(-1)

B. The thermal ionization of  $\text{NH}_3$  in most probability arises as a result of the associative ionization. i.e.



rather than



We shall calculate both rates, however, to delineate the most favorable regime.

Saha's Equation for the last process is

$$\frac{N_e}{N_{\text{NH}_3}} = 2 \left( \frac{2\pi m k T}{h^2} \right)^{3/2} \text{Exp} (-117740/kT) \quad (11a)$$

$$\frac{N_e}{N_{\text{NH}_3}} = 4.8 \times 10^{15} T^{3/2} \text{Exp} \left( -\frac{117740}{kT} \right) \quad (11b)$$

where we have assumed equal statistical weights for  $\text{NH}_3$  and  $\text{NH}_3^+$ . The equilibrium electron density is given in Table III for several temperatures of interest for an  $\text{NH}_3$  density of 40 Torr.

TABLE III

$T(^{\circ}\text{K})$	$N_e (\text{cm}^{-3})$
1160	$1.5 \times 10^{-3}$
2000	$1.6 \times 10^6$
2200	$2.8 \times 10^7$

Now let us consider the associative ionization process. For this we shall utilize the general cross section developed by Nelson and Dahler<sup>9</sup>. The threshold expression for this cross section is

$$\sigma_{ai} = \frac{2.1 R_c^2 \chi}{E} (E - E_{th})^{1.5} \quad (12)$$

Where  $R_c$  is the crossing point,  $E_{th}$  is the threshold for association and  $\chi = 2(2\mu)^{1/2} \Gamma_c / \dot{E}_d$ . Here,  $\Gamma_c$  is the width of the transition and  $\dot{E}_d$  is the derivative of the potential curve at the crossing point. Using (\*)  $\Gamma_c \simeq 0.04$  and  $R_c \simeq 10^{-9}$  cm i.e.  $\chi \simeq 1.6 \times 10^6$  and  $\dot{E}_d \simeq 1.0 \times 10^{-4}$ , we obtain

$$\sigma_{ai} = 4.2 \times 10^{-16} \frac{(E - 5.8)^{3/2}}{E} \quad (13)$$

where  $E$  is in units of eV. Using the slope of this cross section one obtains the following rate coefficient for the associative ionization

$$R_{ai} = 10^{-12} \sqrt{T_g} (5.8 + 2 T_g) e^{-5.8/T_g} \quad (14)$$

where  $T_g$  is in units of eV.

If we assume that the dissociative recombination rate coefficient is  $10^{-6} \text{ cm}^3 \text{ sec}$ , then at equilibrium we will have

$$10^{-6} N_e^2 = R_{ai} H \text{ NH}_2 \quad (15)$$

Table IV gives the values of the electron density using the equilibrium values of  $H$  given in Table II

(\*) Values relevant to  $N + O \rightarrow NO^+ + e$

TABLE IV

<u>T(°K)</u>	<u>H (cm<sup>-3</sup>)</u>	<u>N<sub>e</sub> (cm<sup>-3</sup>)</u>
1160	1.68 x 10 <sup>12</sup>	5.8 x 10 <sup>-4</sup>
2000	2.8 x 10 <sup>16</sup>	2 x 10 <sup>6</sup>
2200	1.4 x 10 <sup>17</sup>	5 x 10 <sup>7</sup>

If one lowers the dissociative recombination rate coefficient by an order of magnitude, the equilibrium electron density will be as in Table V.

TABLE V

<u>T(°K)</u>	<u>N<sub>e</sub> (cm<sup>-3</sup>)</u>
1160	1.8 x 10 <sup>-3</sup>
2000	6.3 x 10 <sup>6</sup>
2200	1.5 x 10 <sup>8</sup>

#### V. THE AVALANCHE IONIZATION OF NH<sub>3</sub>.

The Townsend ionization coefficient for NH<sub>3</sub> has been measured by Risbud and Naidu<sup>10</sup> for  $\frac{E}{N}$  between 115 x 10<sup>-17</sup> V-cm<sup>2</sup> and 2060 x 10<sup>-17</sup> V-cm<sup>2</sup>. The following expressions fit the data to better than 30%.

$$\frac{\alpha}{N} = 1.07 \times 10^{-14} \exp \left( - \frac{1.23 \times 10^{-14}}{E/N} \right) \quad (16)$$

for

$$115(-17) < E/N < 182(-17)$$

and

$$\frac{\alpha}{N} = 4.34 \times 10^{-16} \text{ Exp } \left( - \frac{65.2 \times 10^{-16}}{E/N} \right) \quad (17)$$

for

$$182(-17) < \frac{E}{N} < 2060 (-17)$$

The electron drift velocity, however, is measured<sup>11</sup> over a limited range, i.e. up to  $E/N = 50 \times 10^{-17} \text{ V-cm}^2$ . We have obtained the following fit for the

$$v_d = -1.26 \times 10^6 + 2.0 \times 10^{22} (E/N) \quad (18)$$

drift velocity for the region of  $\frac{E}{N}$  from  $46.1 \times 10^{-17} \text{ V-cm}^2$  to  $54.2 \times 10^{-17} \text{ V-cm}^2$ . This expression can be extended to higher  $E/N$  until further data becomes available.

Using Equations 16 - 18 we obtain the following expressions for the reduced ionization frequency in  $\text{NH}_3$

$$\frac{v_i}{N} = [-1.26 \times 10^6 + 2 \times 10^{22} \left( \frac{E}{N} \right)] \times 2.0 \times 10^{-14} \text{ Exp } \left( - \frac{1.23 \times 10^{-14}}{E/N} \right) \quad (19)$$

for

$$115 (-17) < E/N < 182 (-17)$$

and

$$\frac{v_i}{N} = [-1.26 \times 10^6 + 2 \times 10^{22} (E/N)] 4.34 \times 10^{-16} \text{ Exp } \left( - \frac{65.2 \times 10^{-16}}{E/N} \right) \quad (20)$$

for

$$182 (-17) < E/N < 2060 (-17)$$

The reduced ionization frequency  $\frac{v_i}{N}$  is given in Table VI.

TABLE VI

$E/N$	$\frac{v_{\perp}}{N}$	$E/N$	$\frac{v_{\perp}}{N}$
115 (-17)*	0.494 (-11)	1234 (-17)	6.17 (-8)
123 (-17)	1.14 (-11)	1543 (-17)	8.64 (-8)
154 (-17)	1.06 (-10)		
200 (-17)	6.50 (-10)		
216 (-17)	8.85 (-10)		
308 (-17)	3.08 (-9)		
462 (-17)	9.56 (-9)		
617 (-17)	1.82 (-8)		
925 (-17)	3.9 (-8)		

#### VI. THE ELECTRON BEAM COLLISIONAL IONIZATION OF $\text{NH}_3$

The electron beam ionization of  $\text{NH}_3$  can be estimated readily, provided one knows the  $\text{NH}_3$  stopping power for high energy electrons. For this purpose we shall assume that ammonia is neonlike and its density is equivalent to that of nitrogen atom. Using the calculated data for  $dE/dx$  for neon<sup>12</sup> one obtains a value of  $1.96 \times 10^3$  eV/cm, in one atmosphere of  $\text{NH}_3$ , for electrons with energy of 1 MeV. This value increases by  $\sim 20\%$  when the beam electron energy is 10 MeV.

(\*) (-17) indicates  $10^{-17}$

## VII. CALCULATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding sections we have presented the electron beam collisional and avalanche ionization parameters of  $\text{NH}_3$ . Furthermore, we presented the equilibrium calculations of an  $\text{NH}_3$  channel generated by lasers in the temperature range of 0.1 to 0.19 eV. From these equilibrium relations we have obtained the residual electron density in the same temperature range.

In this section we would like to calculate the residual conductivity for two channels, one at a temperature of 0.1 eV (NRL Experiment) and the other at a temperature of 0.19 eV (Sandia Experiment). Then we will calculate the conductivity generated by two electron beams, one with a radius of 1 cm, a peak current of 8 kA and a current rise time of 20 nsec (NRL Experiment) and the other with a radius of 1 cm, a peak current of 50 kA and a current rise time of 60 nsec (Sandia Experiment). These calculations can be made readily for a short time (1 nsec), which is sufficient enough to provide the needed information on the conductivity generated by the beam.

### VII.1 THE RESIDUAL CHANNEL CONDUCTIVITY

The conductivity of the channel can be expressed by

$$\sigma = 2.5 \times 10^8 N_e / \nu_m \quad (21)$$

where  $\nu_m$  is the momentum transfer collision frequency of electrons in  $\text{NH}_3$ . The cross section for the electron momentum transfer in  $\text{NH}_3$  has been measured by Pack, et al<sup>11</sup> and is shown in Figure 2. In this figure, the electron momentum transfer cross section<sup>13</sup> in  $\text{N}_2$  is also shown for comparison.

The momentum transfer collision frequencies in 40 Torr of  $\text{NH}_3$  with electron temperatures of 0.1 and 0.2 eV are  $\sim 2.7 \times 10^{11} \text{ sec}^{-1}$  and  $4 \times 10^{11}$

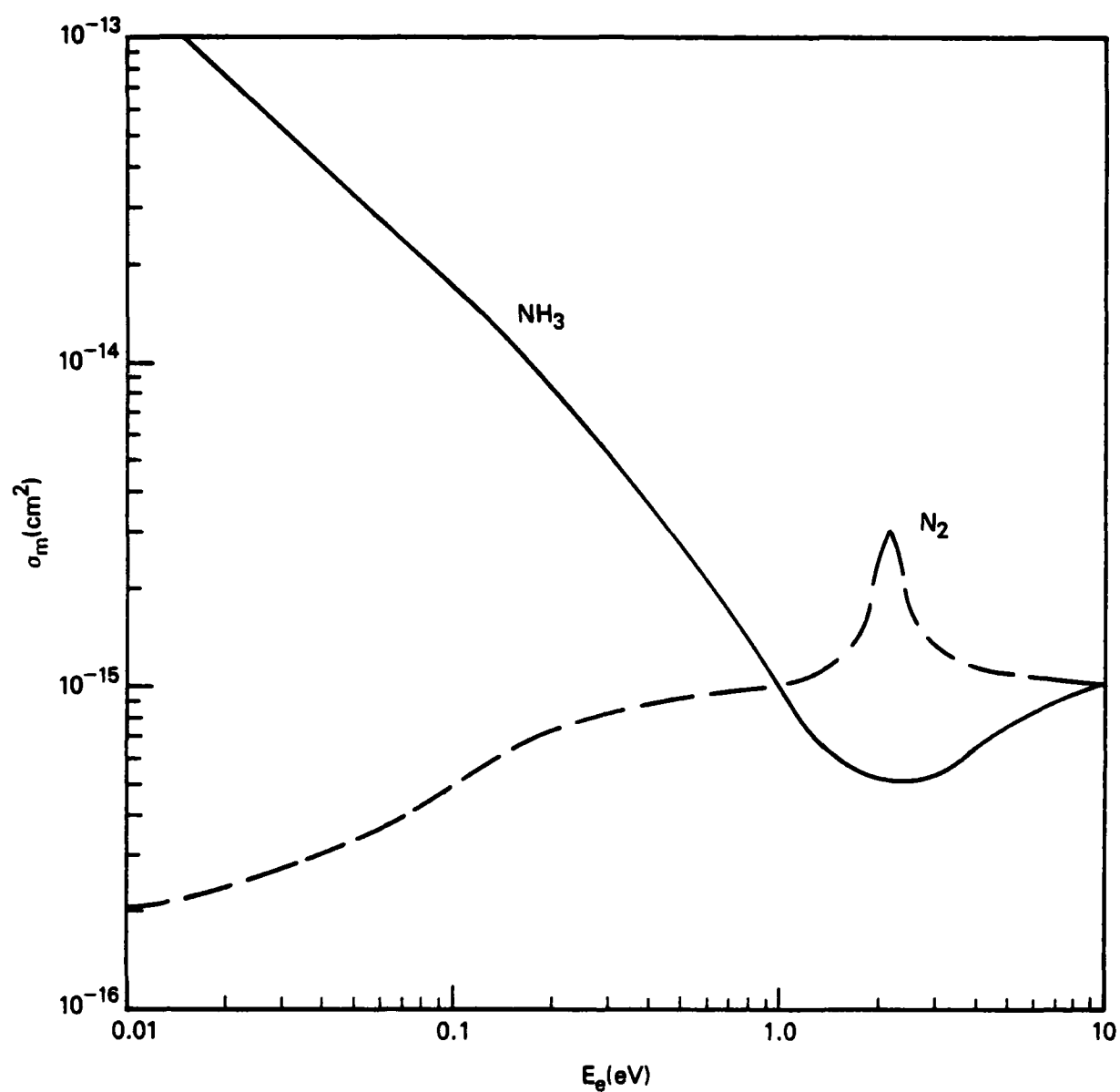


Figure 2 The electron momentum transfer cross section in ammonia and  $\text{N}_2$ .

$\text{sec}^{-1}$ , respectively, corresponding to the experiments of NRL and Sandia. Thus the residual conductivities in these experiments are  $10^{-6} \text{ sec}^{-1}$  (NRL) and  $10^{-5} \text{ sec}^{-1}$  (Sandia). The non-existence of conductivity at the NRL experiment has been borne<sup>7</sup> out by the measurements at NRL. It should be noted (See Figure 2) that when the plasma electron energy increases (when the electron beam enters the channel) the momentum transfer cross section becomes smaller and hence would the collision frequency. The product of  $\sigma v$  varies from  $3.4 \times 10^{-7}$  to  $6 \times 10^{-8}$  for electron energy of 0.1 eV to 1.0 eV which implies a lowering of  $v_m$  by a factor of  $\sim 6$ . Even if this factor could become an order of magnitude the residual conductivity in the Sandia experiment would still be  $\sim 10^6 \text{ sec}^{-1}$ , which is much below  $10^9 \text{ sec}^{-1}$ .

#### VII.II ELECTRON BEAM GENERATED CONDUCTIVITY

A simple hand calculation for the beam ionization in ammonia for the NRL and Sandia Experiments is shown in Figure 3 indicating that the beam generates much more electrons, and in a short time, compared to the residual electron density. These calculations are based on the assumption that  $E_z$  is constant for times shorter than 1 nsec. and that  $I_n = I_b$ . With this the electric field for the Sandia Experiment is twice that of NRL.

In Figure 4 we show the electron production rates for direct and avalanche processes in both NRL and Sandia Experiments, based on a more sophisticated model<sup>14</sup>. This model solves the rate equations for ionization coupled to a simple circuit equation for  $E_z$ . These results show that the role of avalanche ionization is more discernible in the Sandia Experiment than that of NRL. Also if the channel is assumed to be rarefied (due to heating) by a factor of 6, the avalanche ionization in Sandia Experiment plays an important role compared to the direct beam ionization.

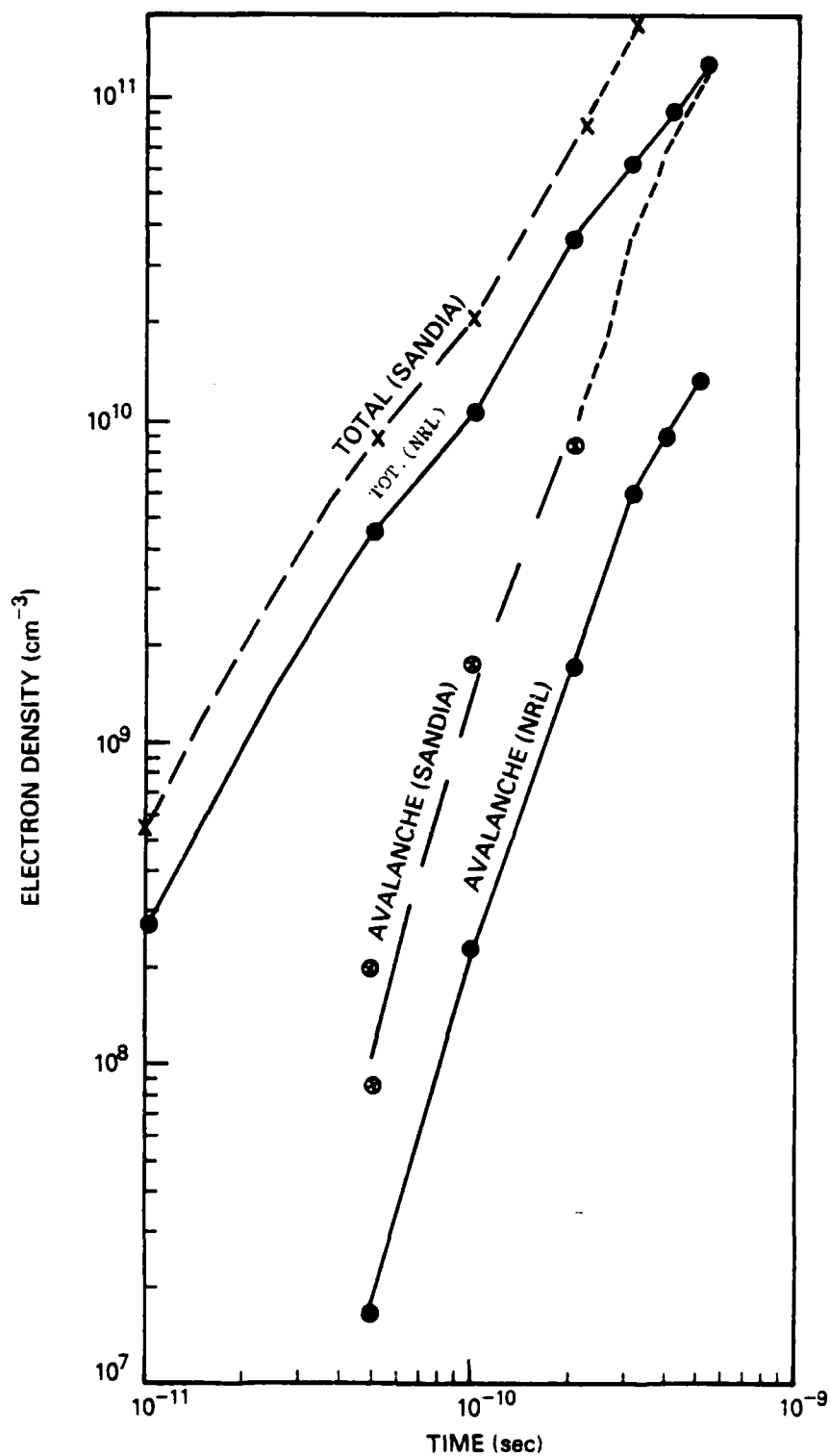


Figure 3 The electron density build up in 40 Torr of ammonia due to beam interaction. The avalanche contribution is shown separately for two experiments (NRL and Sandia).

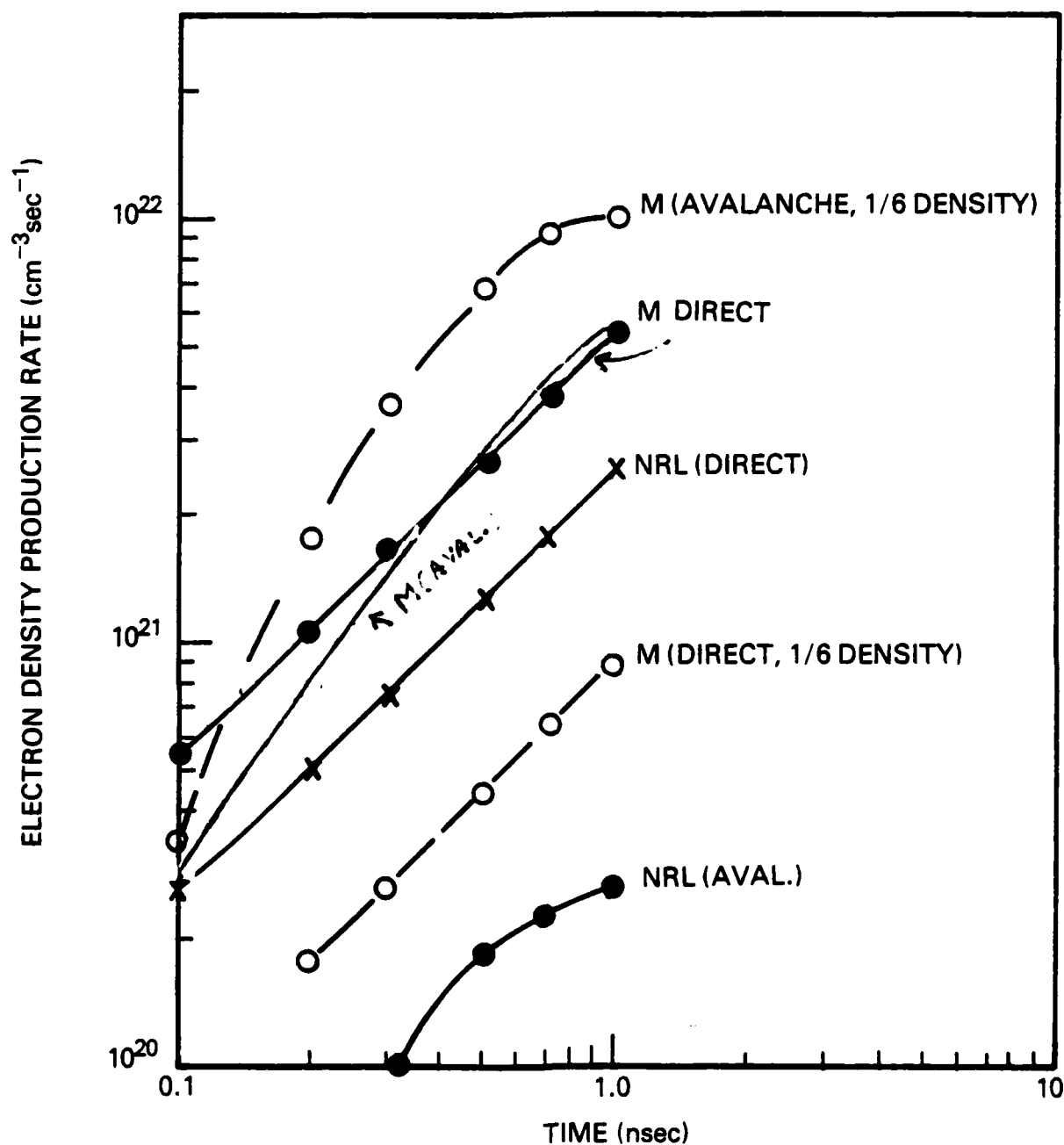


Figure 4 The electron density production rate in 40 Torr of ammonia. Direct beam collisional ionization and avalanche contributions are indicated. The density reduction by a factor of 6 is also shown for the Sandia Experiment.

In conclusion one could say that in both experiments the beam does its own thing and that the small or non existent residual conductivity in the laser heated channel adds very little to the beam generated conductivity. However, the neutral density channel left behind by the laser will modify the conductivity generated by the beam.

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